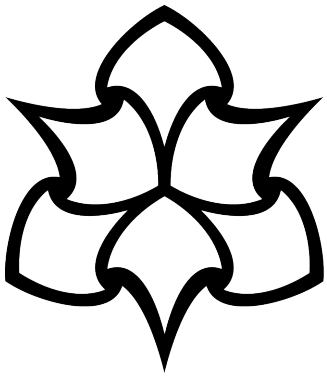

Feeding the Vampire: The Ravenous Hunger of the *fin de siècle*

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Bracketed between the apparent solidity of Victorian values and the cultural scepticism of modernism, the British *fin de siècle* is commonly viewed as a cultural and literary period defined by discourses of transition and ambiguity. Narratives of new beginnings compete with those of apocalyptic endings, the latter expressed in Max Nordau's infamous 'Dusk of Nations' (1895) and in the movements of social Darwinism and Decadence. Terry Eagleton refers to this sense of ambiguity when he summarises the *fin de siècle* as 'split into two opposed directions',[i] and as an epoch which is 'at once, more concrete and more cosmic than what came before, either searching anxiously for some sure foundation or making do with frail intimations of the infinite.'[ii] Heralding the death of traditional Victorian literary forms, the *fin de siècle* simultaneously gives birth to new forms of fiction, poetry and drama that will anticipate many of the aesthetic features informing and inhabiting the texts and critical values of the modernist movement. As Marion Thain argues, modernist literature can be understood as a 'picture of continued themes, images, and concerns traced across the turn of the century.'[iii] Furthermore, a range of new and popular genres at the end of the nineteenth century also hark back to literary categories and figures from previous periods, most notably the New Gothic and as part of it the revival of the vampire. Caught in, and generated by, this fraught relationship between past and future, the vampire of the *fin de siècle* emerges as a figure in whose energy and characteristics many of the epoch's underlying cultural contradictions are negotiated and envisioned. *Fin de siècle* Gothic texts, as Glennis Byron argues, are characterised by 'the drive to define and categorise the features of a culture in crisis, to determine the exact nature of the agents of dissolution and decline.'[iv]

Late nineteenth century Gothic fiction brought the horror both home and *to* the home, when instead of setting the Gothic scene outside of England, its imagined horrors were staged on familiar and domestic territory. Fears related to degeneration culminated in the image of the 'leaking' body and the threat to physical integrity would find its cultural and social echo in anxieties about the erasure of clear distinctions between race, class, gender and national identity. Victims of vampires can count as a typical example of the 'leaking' or disintegrating body and its underlying paradox: they invite the monstrous encounter with the bloodsucking vampire (and the subsequent violation of corporeal integrity) precisely because their bodies are already represented as weakened in relation to concepts of dominant sexual, gender and racial identity. The trope of the 'open' or 'leaking' body imagines individual as well as social bodies as vulnerable to disease and infections and in danger of being invaded by what should stay firmly exterior and foreign to them. The vampire can thus be regarded as emblematic of the fears that haunted the late nineteenth century, and the Gothic, mirroring the vampire's idiosyncrasies, progressed into a genre that became 'always already excessive, grotesque, over spilling its own boundaries and limits.'[v] Disrupted by its own alterity, the *fin de siècle* Gothic, like the vampire, is always in the process of assuming new identities, and it is precisely this self-reproductive power, this hunger for more, that exasperates any attempts to define the Gothic and the vampire in a singular and consistent manner. Furthermore, when engaging with moments of transition and crisis, it is the continuous loop of hunger that emerges as the vampire's most distinguishing and crucial feature. More than just the driving force of the vampire, hunger in late Victorian Gothic fiction functions as a methodological means to explore and imagine what it means to be human in a modern world. Leon R. Kass points out that 'knowledge of the hungry soul offers us a richer and more truthful self-understanding than is currently available in our dominant modes of thought'.[vi] Similarly, approaching the figure of the vampire and its literary habitat of late Victorian Gothic fiction

from the perspective of feeding, hunger and appetite might open up some new avenues in our understanding of what being human means in times of change and transition.

In this chapter, hunger and its various connotations with discourses of productivity and consumption will be explored as a major force in the way in which both *fin de siècle* Gothic fiction and the vampire can be understood as epistemological sites where the condition of humanity in the modern world is negotiated and scrutinised in its ethical limitations. Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) and Sheridan Le Fanu's novella 'Carmilla' (1871) will constitute the two main fictional sources that will be explored in relation to the vampire's 'hungry soul' and how its fictional representation interconnects with and is embedded in social, political and cultural anxieties that defined the *fin de siècle* as a distinct epoch. The vampire's interminable hunger and unstoppable need to feed, therefore, rather than marking the figure as the very antithesis of human, as so many vampire narratives want to make us believe, could be read as an extraordinary cultural emblem of what being human denotes: how to deal with hunger. The very essence of the vampire consists of hunger; at their core, vampires display an emptiness that is in constant need of filling up. However, if it is insatiable hunger that marks vampiric identity, eating and/or feeding could be conceived of as threatening the vampire's very being. This, as so many critical readings of vampire fiction suggest, allows us to read the figure as a problematisation of the parameters underlying social and cultural constructions of identity.[vii] In the following, I will address vampiric desire by exploring further the relationship between the relentless hunger of the vampire, its polymorphous body, and its significance as a powerful emblem for the cultural and political anxieties that give the *fin de siècle* its discrete literary and historical identity.

Hunger functions on more than one level in relation to the late Victorian vampire and its textual home of Gothic fiction. The emergence of vampire fiction in the nineteenth century reached a peak with the publication of Stoker's novel but the genre's enduring readership would be a product of the manifold adaptations and variations of the vampire story of the following centuries. The narrative of *Dracula* ends in deceptive closure only to instill an appetite for more of the same, thus replaying the contagious bite of the vampire on the level of textual production: vampire narratives remain as popular now as they were at the *fin de siecle*. Vampires, it seems, infected their readers with the same hunger pangs they themselves deliriously celebrated and suffered from. The horror elicited by vampires is provoked by their uncontrollable hunger which endows them with power and simultaneously takes away their agency, an ambivalence that, according to Fred Botting, is deeply human: 'Horror constitutes the limit of reason, sense, consciousness and speech, the very emotion in which the human reaches its limit. Horror is thus ambivalently human.'[viii]

This ambivalent humanness is particularly potent in the vampire's hunger, which is as infectious as their drive to reproduce and pro/create. Maud Ellmann argues that vampirism is implicit in the creative process itself and that the different elements involved in the production and generic positioning of literary texts are linked to each other by an exchange of energies so that each of them 'invigorates itself only by devouring the life-blood of the other.'[ix] Furthermore, Ellmann points out that it 'is hardly surprising [… ] that the legend of the vampire was revived at the same time that the image of the starving artist was invented, for both express the fear of being eaten by one's own creation, sapped by writing, bled by words.'[x] By way of consuming and feeding of what is perceived as residing outside the self, the vampire establishes a process of transformation that will affect the self as well as the world in which this act takes place. This relationship between consumption and productivity is based on the paradox that the process of devouring and incorporating makes things disappear only to return them to/on us in a

transformed state. Fuelled by the politics of hunger, late Victorian Gothic fiction and in particular the figure of the vampire engage with and contribute to cultural anxieties that are created by discourses of consumption and consumerism of late Victorian capitalism. The newly emerging conditions of *fin de siecle* consumer culture, for example, created a direct link between vampire fiction and female appetites for foreign goods, now openly and seductively displayed in the modern metropolitan department stores. Shopping as an activity contributed to the eroding borderline between the (gendered) private and public spheres and concurrently on the notion of fixed gender and sexual identities. Commercial culture provided new agencies in particular for women as consumers and sales persons and, on the other hand, reinforced already existing affinities between female bodies and their availability as commodities for economic transactions.[xi] The insatiable hunger of vampires acts as a potent signifier for the increasing volatility of identity concepts at the *fin de siècle* by pointing out that 'construction and reconstruction of self requires a constant transformation of the world.'[xii]

The vampire whose hunger is satiated is no longer a vampire. It is thus only via hunger, the constant anticipation and *fear* of food and the closure that its consumption entails that both the Gothic and one of its most notorious figures are constituted. Hunger as a symptom and a drive desperately cries out for its own annulment, not only figuratively speaking, but also in its physical meaning: it must be sated to ensure survival. This is of particular relevance in relation to the hunger of the vampire but also refers to other *fin-de-siecle* texts in which hunger emerges as a central trope. Knut Hamsun's novel *Hunger* from 1890, for example, focuses on this ambiguity by framing the narrative of a writer's starvation and creative block between images of emptiness and fullness:

> During this fruitless effort my thoughts began to get confused again – I felt my brain literally snap, my head was emptying and emptying, and in the end it sat light and void

> on my shoulders. I perceived this gaping emptiness in my head with my whole body, I felt hollowed out from top to toe.[xiii]

Feeling full of emptiness, the novel reverses the Cartesian relationship between body and mind when the mental space is imagined as incorporated by the effects of hunger. Like the vampire, Hamsun's protagonist is always on the hunt for satisfaction, but it is emptiness, his *hunger* for words and food that keeps him going and thus defines what and who he is. As soon as he produces words, he is taken over by feelings of dissatisfaction and rips up the pages. If, occasionally, he can afford food, he brings it all up again and ends up as empty as before his meal:

> The food began to take effect, it gave me great pain and I wasn't allowed to keep it for very long. I emptied my mouth in every dark corner I passed, struggling to suppress the nausea that was hollowing me out afresh, … and furiously gulping down again whatever wanted to come up – but in vain! I ran at last into an entranceway where, hunched over and blinded with the water that flooded my eyes, I emptied myself once again.[xiv]

The analogy to the vampire works on at least two levels in this passage: Hamsun's protagonist, as suggested above, is *like* a vampire, driven by a constant need for words and food that can never be satisfied. It is therefore emptiness and hunger, rather than their satiation that emerges as his aim and *raison d'être*. In addition, writing and eating actually act in a vampiric manner on the self of the character. These twin acts come to possess him and in doing so, bleed him dry, recreating him as hunger itself. To devour equals being devoured, the above passage seems to suggest, and eating, that mundane and natural act, spills over into the grotesque and so questions concepts of control and autonomy. Like the vomit that projects from his stomach, Hamsun's protagonist comes only into being in the transitional moments of exchange, in the abject

disintegration of the corporeal, as well as the textual, body. Being full of hunger is the only way to exist and becomes synonymous with being alive itself.

Nicholas Royle describes Hamsun's novel as defined by 'a ghostly irony that is a power of interruption, discontinuity, non-presence'.[xv] It participates in and is refracted by the *fin de siècle,* an era that oscillates between tradition and modernity, whose cultural identity is intrinsically linked to the defiance of clear-cut historical and aesthetic categorisations. Vampire fiction similarly privileges uncertainty, doubt, confusion and fear, both in terms of content and in relation to textual and/or narrative structure. Whilst it is not suggested that the narrative and structural characteristics displayed in *Hunger* are the same as in vampire fiction, both share as their main element the moment and movement of hunger as something that drives their narratives as well as their textual structures and characters. Hunger is not just used metaphorically; it is deeply ingrained in the various anxieties and crises that construct this period as torn between tradition and modernity, a tension that aligns the moment of identity with the moment of splitting and separation. In other words, the representation of hunger and emptiness is here closely linked to identity and thus prescient of the sense of instability that will become the trademark of modern subjectivity. Hamsun's hungry protagonist, always existing on the edge of death, is literally incarnated by 'the transitory, the perishable, the changeable':[xvi] a state we will re-encounter in the vampire's ravenous craving for feeding in which the separation between subject and object is under erasure.

This connection between food and death emerges as a key theme in the last decades of the nineteenth century, and the voracious appetites in *Hunger* as well as in vampire fiction can be understood as a furious recognition of the fact that the only thing we can count on for sure is that we will be hungry again. Gorging on emptiness can be understood as a crucial trope for anxieties represented by vampirism and creates similar anxieties as Darwinism and its corollary, the demise of God. The vampire, fueled by the desire to feed in order to stay immortal, is

emblematic of a concept of life that is simultaneously sustained and threatened by the act of eating. As Susanne Skubal suggests, food is the locus of death and immortality and thus always marked by impermanence:

> Our desire to eat still re-enacts our desire to know, to taste, to partake of the stuff of the gods. We eat to live and life is all we know of immortality. So it is that all eating bears the mark of transgression, of sin. Even more, it betrays our mortality with every mouthful.[xvii]

Referring to the biblical story of the tree of knowledge and how partaking of it defined being human as transgressing the laws of the immortal God, Skubal points out how the act of eating is inhabited by the desire for immortality and at the same time acts as a constant reminder of our mortality. This inherent volatility of eating and the ways in which it relates human nature to both the immortal and mortal turns eating into an act of transgression made visible in the insatiable hunger of the vampire. In *Dracula* and 'Carmilla' the vampire's excessive and relentless feeding habits emerge as the unsettling and disturbing matrix of modern human subjectivity as defined by transgression itself, rather than, as previous readings have understood them, emblematic of the forces of archaism and tradition.

Whilst *fin de siècle* Gothic gestures towards the past, it also performs a radical break with it, since it re-positions horror and terror within new cultural, social and historical conditions. The vampire is regurgitated from the past and returns as a potent signifier of the crises in discourses of social, corporeal and spiritual decline and degeneration that affected and delineated the period as a time of transition. One of the most remarkable aspects of *fin de siècle* vampires is their ability to articulate fears about the self by presenting themselves as foreign and other. As Judith Halberstam argues so poignantly, 'Dracula is otherness itself, a distilled version of all others produced by and within fictional texts, sexual science and

psychopathology.'[xviii] Put into motion by an insatiable hunger and an uncontrollable desire to feed, literary characters such as Dracula and Carmilla can only inhabit their own identity in the act of feeding, in other words when they transgress the borderline between self and other. For Ken Gelder the vampire therefore functions as a

> Self-Image, a means of figuring socio-political-sexual excesses which, although represented as foreign lie much closer to home. "The fantastic" in fact draws Self and Other together, showing the boundaries between them to be fragile and easily traversed. In "the fantastic", the self is thus ontologically destabilised by an Other, which far from being different, turns out instead to be disconcertingly familiar.[xix]

Thus, rather than inhabiting the realm of Otherness, vampires via the idiosyncratic signifier of insatiable hunger – the compelling desire to turn outside into inside - draw attention to the impossibility of a given separation between the two spheres and binary constructions in general.

Dracula and Carmilla, in using hunger as both a driver for plot and a means to structure their narratives, stage oral impulses at their centre and in so doing re-shape the vampire as well as the literary genre they inhabit. The vampire was thus recycled as an emblem of horror and terror and at the same time brought forth the re-birth of the genre with the result that the Gothic and the vampire feed on each other in the most productive manner. The moment of feeding emerges here as the driving force underlying the establishment of the gothic as a specific genre of the late nineteenth century, and furthermore determines the manner in which it will impact epistemologically on its historical and cultural context. Whilst feeding and eating can often be used synonymously, vampire fiction relies on a categorical difference between the two. Vampires, as van Helsing points out, don't eat:

> The vampire live (sic) on, and cannot die by mere passing of the time; he can flourish when that he can fatten on the blood of the living. Even more, we have seen amongst us that he can even grow younger; that his vital faculties grow strenuous, and seem as though they refresh themselves when his special pabulum is plenty. But he cannot flourish without this diet; he eat not as others. Even friend Jonathan, who lived with him for weeks, did never see him to eat, never![xx]

By pointing out Dracula's non-eating, van Helsing intends to emphasise the vampire's difference and exclusion from human identity. Instead of consuming food, the count fattens on the blood of the living, which makes his macabre diet always contingent on some*body* to feed on. In contrast to eating, feeding is marked by a very distinct ambiguity in relation to its direction: to feed refers to the action of feeding, and at the same time to the giving of food. The meaning of feeding is thus inhabited by a certain ambivalence because the distinction between who is feeding (the giver of food) and who is fed (the receiver of food) is blurred. Vampires, by feeding on their victims when draining their bodies of blood, give them a new, immortal life by feeding them with the desire of constant hunger. As a perversion of the biblical image of God breathing life into his creations, the horror of vampiric orality is thus the destruction *and* creation of life. Dracula makes this correlation between feeding and producing a new order more than evident:

> My revenge is just begun! I spread it over centuries, and time is on my side. Your girls that you all love are mine already; and through them you and others shall yet be mine – my creatures, to do my bidding and to be my jackals when I want to feed.[xxi]

Dracula feeds time and feeds on time as well as on his victims and, as has been shown persuasively in a wide range of publications on the text, on the female body in order to install his empire of vampiric orality.[xxii] Female bodies are his victims and his collaborators in this

alliance of feeding. When feeding on Lucy Westenra, Dracula transforms what is viewed traditionally as the very core of femininity and femaleness, the ability to give birth to and nourish children, into the mark of her bond with the vampire. Lucy, instead of feeding children, feeds *on* children when driven by her vampiric hunger, a reversal of breastfeeding which acts as a mark of her departure from the dominant Victorian cultural and sexual definition of femininity. The narrative voice that reports the drastic transformation from woman to monster is Dr Seward's which links his disgust not only to patriarchal bourgeois discourses of femininity but, furthermore emphasises the medical profession's view of the female body as intrinsically perfidious and unstable:

> Oh, God, how it made me shudder to see it! With a careless motion, she flung to the ground, callous as a devil, the child that up to now she had clutched strenuously to her breast, growling over it as a dog growls over a bone. The child gave a sharp cry, and lay there moaning.[xxiii]

This image of reverse breastfeeding underlines the extent to which femininity and the female body are thematically and ideologically implicated in the horror of the vampire and calls attention to the ambiguity underlying feeding itself. At the core of Dr Seward's abject horror is the act of feeding and the way it blurs the notion of a distinction between subject and object. Instead of feeding the child, the female/mother feeds on the child, creating an image in which universal anxieties about breastfeeding and early experiences of orality return in a ghostly and haunting manner. In order to emphasise the abjectness of this transgression, the text displays a further perversion of the act of breastfeeding when Mina feeds on Dracula's breast as he attempts to recruit her as a vampire:

> His face was turned from us, but the instant we saw we all recognized the Count – in every way, even to the scar on his forehead. With his left hand he held both Mrs

> Harker's hands, keeping them away with her arms at full tension; his right hand gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom. Her white nightdress was smeared with blood, and a thin stream trickled down the man's bare breast which was shown by his torn –open dress.[xxiv]

Feeding is defined as an ambiguous act because it blurs the lines between sexuality and the intake of nourishment. Furthermore, the role of the maternal/female in feeding and the provision of food itself is now associated with perversion. Dracula's male breast acts as the nourishing mother, and by doing so creates a direct link between breastfeeding, which gives and sustains life, and vampiric blood sucking which will eventually result in the death of humanity. Uncannily, it is this image that haunts Freud's description of the relationship between mother and infant in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, published a few years after Dracula in 1905, where he argues that sexual desire is propped onto the experience of breastfeeding:

> No one who has seen a baby sinking back satiated from the breast and falling asleep with flushed cheeks and a blissful smile can escape the reflection that this picture persists as a prototype of the expression of sexual satisfaction in later life.[xxv]

Earlier in his essay Freud also makes the point that there are 'good reasons why a child sucking at his mother's breast has become the prototype of every relation to love',[xxvi] a bold statement that assigns the process of eating a primary as well as a central position in connection to the construction of the self and of intersubjective relations. It is therefore not by his otherness that the vampire in *Dracula* haunts and threatens humanity. What gives him his aura of terror is the way in which his interactions recall anxieties surrounding fundamental aspects of human identity in relation to food and feeding. By way of alienation and doubling, both typical features of the gothic genre, in *fin de siècle* vampire fiction, Dracula's vampiric hunger and explicit non-

eating can be read as a poignant comment on the ambiguous meaning of eating as a source of sustaining life and as a constant reminder of the human body's mortality.

This ambiguity of eating and feeding would become of central importance in Freud's work on the construction of modern identity. Maud Ellmann argues that Freud links eating and feeding to trauma: '[o]ur first experience of eating is force-feeding: as infants we were fed by others and ravished by the food they thrust into our jaws.'[xxvii] Furthermore, Freud's concept of sexuality as the matrix of subjectivity is mapped essentially on eating and the experience of feeding:

> Since sexuality originates in eating, it is always haunted by the imagery of ingestion, having neither an object or territory proper to itself. Yet eating, in its turn, exceeds the biological demand for nourishment, for it expresses the desire to possess the object unconditionally.'[xxviii]

The vampire's obsession with, and dependence upon, feeding can thus be read as a perverse miming of what is deeply human and of the way in which the self engages with the 'outside other'. Elspeth Probyn formulates this complex relationship between self and other in direct relationship to eating when she asks the following questions:

> Do we eat what we are, or are we what we eat? Do we eat or are we eaten? In less cryptic terms, in eating, do we confirm our identities, or are our identities reforged, and refracted by what and how we eat?'[xxix]

Dracula, driven by his compulsive hunger and interdependence with his victims, makes his appearance at a time that is defined by a simultaneous embrace and rejection of modernity and thus emerges as a potent signifier for the ambiguous conditions of modern subjectivity. The modern self constantly transgresses the line between consuming compulsively what is other to itself and anxiously rejecting whatever is perceived as an intrusion/invasion of the self. And

transgression, as Sarah Sceats argues, 'the crossing of boundaries, is of course the essence of the vampire.'[xxx] If we understand, following Ellman, the experience of force-feeding as fundamental to eating, then Dracula's use of eating as a way to understand how individual bodies and identities are formed can also be read as an exploration of the role of historical and cultural realities in these processes.

For Priscilla L. Walton, Stoker's novel 'is a prodigious exemplar of the fears that surround the potential invasion of the Other.'[xxxi] However, when reading the figure of the vampire in *Dracula*, in direct relation to the act of feeding/eating, it is evident that the Other does not reside outside the self, but is already inhabiting the latter as its own alterity and constant hunger.

'Do we eat or are we eaten?' is a question that is also central to Sheridan Le Fanu's novella 'Carmilla', whose eponymous title figure inspired Stoker's highly sexualised representation of the three female vampires. Furthermore, the connection between horror and (breast)feeding as a trope for anxieties surrounding the fragile state of modern identity also features as a central concern of the text as demonstrated in this dream sequence related by Laura:

> I saw a solemn, but very pretty face looking at me from the side of the bed: It was that of a young lady who was kneeling, with her hands under the coverlet: I looked at her with a kind of pleased wonder, and ceased whimpering. She caressed me with her hands, and lay down beside me on the bed, and drew me towards her smiling; I felt immediately delightfully soothed, and fell asleep again. I was wakened by a sensation as if two needles run into my breast very deep at the same moment, and I cried loudly.

> The lady started back, with her eyes fixed on me, and then slipped down upon the floor, and, as I thought, hid herself under the bed.[xxxii]

'Carmilla' is narrated retrospectively from the point of view of Laura, a young girl who lives with her father in a remote castle in Styria and who will emerge as the victim and double of the vampire. The novella was published in a collection of short stories with the title *In a Glass Darkly* whose different items are presented as the case stories of Dr Martin Hesselius. The collection, as the introduction explains, has been compiled by Hesselius' medical secretary, like him a physician and 'an enthusiast in his profession'[xxxiii]. The complicated narrative framework, in which the novella is presented, emphasises its underlying polyvocality, making it impossible to identify a single original source to which the different stories could be reconnected. Moreover, oscillating between literary and medical discourses, the collected stories participate in and contribute to the genre of the case story, a narrative form that originates in the *fin de siècle*. This hybrid emerges as a converging of fictional, criminal, medical and psychoanalytical discourses, and thus draws attention to the way in which these texts comment on each other's themes and forms. By feeding on each other, these different discursive narrative structures manufacture the case story as a form that plays on doubling and repetition, both elements not only central to the gothic but also of vampiric activity. Le Fanu's choice of the case story as the form for the narrative means that 'Carmilla' and Carmilla are caught in moments of doubling and repetition. The female vampire(s) of the story thus not only feed/feed on their discursive context, but, furthermore, the theme of feeding and its underlying ambiguity establish the performative parameters in which subjectivity can be narrated. The complex structure of the text complicates time frames and blurs the line between fantasy and reality as is evident from the dream sequence quoted above. In an already retrospectively created narrative framework Laura shares her dream as an early childhood memory and it is clear that its nightmarish nature is instigated by a

perversion and reversal of the mother–child relationship. The trauma she recalls is directly related to the moment of (breast)feeding and serves as a prescient thematic and epistemological framework for the narrative to follow.

The dream is a crucial moment in which the act of feeding connects Laura's terror not only with the past – her unknown dead mother – but also with the future, and the vampire Carmilla whom she is yet to meet. This dream scene and its representation of feeding as blurring the lines between past and future, as well as desire and violence, will always haunt Laura and Carmilla's relationship. In addition, the ghostly presence of the mother and the fact that Laura and Carmilla share an uncanny resemblance will further complicate the distinction between object and subject, of who is eaten and who eats. Invoking the trope of feeding as a signifier for maternal care, vampiric attack and loss of discrete identity, the narrative as a whole suffers from intermittent disruptions by moments of repetition and doubling. This connection is even more evident in another dream of Laura's:

> One night, instead of the voice I was accustomed to hear in the dark, I heard one, sweet and tender, and at the same time terrible, which said, 'Your mother warns you to beware of the assassin.' At the same time a light unexpectedly sprang up, and I saw Carmilla, standing near the foot of my bed, in her white nightdress, bathed from her chin to her feet, on one great stain of blood.[xxxiv]

According to Freud, early moments of the oral and the experience of feeding are haunted by the complex relationship between self and other, a connection that is also a recurrent theme in late Victorian vampire fiction. Carmilla and Dracula are ghostly creatures that hark back to something that is not safely in the (historical) past. By associating their reign of terror with the everyday act of eating and feeding, the figure of the vampire functions as a reference point that transgresses a fixed temporality. As Julian Wolfreys suggests, the ghost

> does not arrive after the fact, after the so-called reality of the situation. It is […] the condition or possibility of any mode of representation. The spectral is that which makes possible reproduction even as it also fragments and ruins the very possibility of reproduction's apparent guarantee to represent that which is no longer fully there. … A spectre haunts modernity, and the spectral is at the heart of any narrative of the modern.[xxxv]

Dracula and Carmilla and their vampiric activities not only haunt a stable concept of history in which the past is imagined as overcome by the present, as suggested by their endings in which the forces of modernity are victorious.[xxxvi] With their insatiable hunger they also, in accordance with Wolfrey's concept of the spectral, fragment and disrupt narratives of modernity and modern identity and they function at the same time as the condition of their representation.

In addition, the ambiguity of feeding, particularly in the manner it is represented in vampire fiction, works to disrupt identity through playing with notions of singularity and autonomy. Visually, the image of breast/vampiric feeding produces a rather monstrous creature through the conjoining of two bodies which defies any notion of what is regarded as 'normal.' Not only do we see double, but we also imagine a leaking body that blurs the distinction between inside and outside. Furthermore, the act itself is, at least on an unconscious level, always reminiscent of the taboo of cannibalism and the way it shifts identification via incorporation into the proximity of annihilation. Incorporating/eating the other indicates that physical as well as psychical self-preservation is not only contingent on the other; it also suggests that the idea of an autonomous identity is haunted by alterity and alienation. What turns the vampire into such a threatening figure is an otherness which is, paradoxically, deeply familiar to us. We imbibe and experience it when participating in feeding and eating, both strangely uncanny acts connoted with wholesomeness; this connection, however, is always disrupted

by their ability to make the familiar 'uncomfortably, even frighteningly unfamiliar.'[xxxvii] Vampires, through their inherent association with feeding, act as an externalisation and projection of fears that are actually located in (and as) the place we experience as our innermost core. These fears are invoked when the borderline between inside and outside threatens to collapse, and then emerge as a sense of abject disgust that culminates both in and as the textual imaginations of vampiric feeding. In 'Carmilla' the vampiric act literally remains imaginary. Both Laura and the General's daughter, a former victim of Carmilla, only ever remember the attack as dreams which, from a Freudian point of view, couples their fear with unconscious wish fulfilment. These repetitive dreams nearly always include a reference to breasts: 'I was wakened by a sensation as if two needles ran into my breast…';[xxxviii] '… I felt a stinging pain as if two large needles darted, an inch or two apart, deep into my breast.'[xxxix] However, when examined by a doctor in the presence of her father, Laura's wounds are actually located 'only an inch or two below the edge'[xl] of her collar. On its unconscious level, in the dream language of its feminine protagonists, the text makes the link between the vampire and breastfeeding strikingly obvious, only to obscure it again on its conscious level, the world of patriarchal figures such as fathers, doctors and generals. By doing so, the narrative is haunted on a temporal level when it anticipates the themes and arguments that will preoccupy the emerging discourses of psychoanalysis, especially their discussion of the oral as inhabiting and as being performative of gender identity and sexuality. Furthermore, 'Carmilla', a text that is structured both by and as constant repetition, is haunted by its own desire to control and master the anxiety that defines its textual structure and the genre to which it belongs and contributes. Whenever the connection to breastfeeding, itself compulsively repeated in the novella, appears as too close for comfort, vampiric feeding is displaced physically as well as interpretatively as wounds on the throat. For example, whilst all of Laura's nightmares refer to a sensation 'as if two needles ran into my breast'[xli], in

her examination by the male doctor the soreness is located by Laura as '[V] ery little below my throat – '[xlii]. The throat in its ambiguity as a space which channels food as well as language becomes a safer place since it shifts the attention from feeding to eating, an activity in which the vampire does not partake. The throat's association with language makes it a space in which fears and anxieties can be translated into 'cultural orality': the ambiguity of the throat distracts from the corporeal attack by literally turning it into something that can be talked about – the famous 'talking cure' of Freudian psychoanalysis.

From a psychoanalytical point of view, and in particular in the work of Freud in the 1920s, repetition became central to the possibility of cure, when the patient could return to disturbing memories which, with the help of the analyst, could be translated into conscious understanding. However, repetition is also a major element of the Freudian theorisation of the death drive in which repetition becomes a psychic end in itself and directly linked to death. Death, however, as Elisabeth Bronfen argues in her discussion of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, is, via repetition, always connected to the maternal:

> [R]epetition serves to acknowledge the death drive beyond the pleasure principle in the sense that the mother/infant dyad must be renounced and translated into supplementation because the division death threatens is always inherent in this pleasurable unity. Repetition serves to return to the pleasure principle in that its substitutions afford the means for a denial of the workings of death in life.[xliii]

Furthermore, as Bronfen adds, this 'figure of division […] not only breaks but also constructs'[xliv], with the effect that repetition 'acts to cover up a narcissistic wound, but this wound […] never heals without leaving its mark'[xlv]. Similarly, the bite-mark of the vampire

is the mark of death *and* life, or, to be more precise the mark of death *in* life, the mark of hunger and, concomitantly, of the fantasy of complete satisfaction: the moment of stasis, the moment of death. By connecting the breast with the throat, and therefore the ambiguity of feeding with eating and language, the vampire makes us choke constantly, on food as well as words.

Vampiric action and its realisation in vampire literature could therefore be understood, from a structural as well as from a thematic perspective, as repetition *per se*. *Dracula* as well as 'Carmilla' function on a level of endless repetition resulting in an understanding of the vampire as a figure defined as and by repetitive compulsion. In her essay 'Vampires, Breast-Feeding and Anxiety' (2000), Joan Copjec problematises repetition in relation to Lacan's theory, in particular to the connection between the real and the symbolic:

> The real that is to be negated cannot be represented by a signifier, since the real is, by definition that which *has* no adequate signifier. How, then, can this negation take place *within* the symbolic as the requirement demands? The answer is: through repetition, through the signifier's repeated attempt – and failure to designate itself. The signifier's difference from itself, its radical inability to signify itself, causes it to turn in circles around the real that is lacking in it. It is in this way – in the circumscription of the real – that its non-existence or its negotiation is signified *within* the symbolic.[xlvi]

In reference to Freud's work on negation, Copjec argues that the symbolic must include its own negation with the effect that it does not only contain itself but also the surplus element of negation. The relationship between breastfeeding and vampires that Copjec creates in her essay is directly linked to repetition and negation as part of the moment of extimacy. She

argues that, whereas the image of the infant sucking on the maternal breast usually is not connected to anxiety, this is not the case for the act of breastfeeding itself in which the breast can no longer function as a fantasy for its object-cause of desire:

> The breast – like the gaze, the voice, the phallus and the feces – is an object, an appendage of the body, from which we separate ourselves in order to constitute ourselves as subjects. To constitute ourselves, we must, …, reject our nonselves. … this rejection can only be accomplished through the inclusion within ourselves of this negation of what we are not – within our being, this lack-of-being. These Freudian objects are, then, not only rejected from, but also internal to the subject. In brief, they are *extimate*, which means they are in us as that which is not us.[xlvii]

For Copjec the 'horrifyingly obscene moment'[xlviii] in *Dracula* when Mina drinks from the breast of the vampire refers to the horror of the vampire as an overt intimacy with the extimate object in which 'society itself is endangered.'[xlix] In 'Carmilla' this moment of horror comes into being when the wounds experienced by the female victims as inflicted on their breasts are physically shifted onto the throat and diagnostically situated in the sphere of paternal control.

The moment of (breast)feeding is negated as a cause of and for anxiety, but it is precisely this gesture of negation, repeated again and again, that inhabits vampire narratives as their designated extimate, as that in which internal cohesion of the text can, paradoxically, only be guaranteed by an alterity right at its centre.

Whereas Freud's theorisation of the uncanny is developed mainly in relation to the gaze in E.T.A. Hoffmann's narrative 'The Sandman' (1816), for Copjec, 'vampire fiction demonstrates' that 'the uncanny can also manifest itself as an over-proximity to the 'extimate' breast'[l], and thus in relation to feeding and eating. In a relationship based on extimacy, as Jacques Alain Miller points out the 'most intimate is at the same time the most hidden.…The most intimate is not the point of transparency but rather a point of opacity. … Extimacy says that the intimate is Other – like a foreign body, a parasite.'[li] Lacan also refers to extimacy by utilizing it as a way to discuss how in psychoanalysis inside and outside are never in direct opposition to each other, with the effect that the centre of the subject, rather than hidden inside, is located outside. In other words, subjectivity is always ex-centric. The vampire and the horror it instigates is thus not so much the horror of the Other, but, rather, the horror of the Other as inhabiting the self, as something that resides within us as alienation. The confusion between container and contained is brilliantly signified by the figure of the vampire and its feeding on and of O/others, something that will also, in an extimate manner, haunt our relationship to food and eating in general. Every time food is ingested and digested, bodies are possessed by an Other resulting in an experience of identity that is always tinged with anxiety and unconscious fear. The mundane act of eating and the intake of food, as much as it sustains life, also always incurs a situation of crisis, evident in our apparent powerlessness when it comes to solving the problem of obesity, anorexia and other eating disorders.[lii] Both psychoanalysis and the gothic as specific discourses of the *fin de siècle*, visualise and problematize these issues in their particular imaginations of inside and outside as simultaneously constructed, and annihilated when it comes to food and feeding. Furthermore, the extimate link between self and other, again both preoccupations of psychoanalysis as well as of vampire fiction, is nowhere more pertinent and visible than in the love/hate relationship with food. Whereas the late nineteenth century

shuddered in horror when confronted with the vampire as a spectre haunting the parameters of its notion of modernity, two hundred years later post-modern vampires populate the cultural nightmares of the western hemisphere in the shape of the either grotesquely obese or pityingly emaciated bodies of their new victims. Eating and food are always just that and always something different, other and more – they are, like the vampire, well and truly uncanny.

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[ii] Eagleton, 'The Flight of the Real', p. 13.

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[vii] For example: N. Auerbach, *Women and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982) and *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995); P. Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism 1830-1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988); E. Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992); J. Copjec, ' Vampires, Breast-Feeding, and Anxiety', *October,* 27, (1991), pp. 25-43; C. Craft, '"Kiss me with Those red Lips": Gender and Invasion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*', in Elaine Showalter (ed.), *Speaking of Gender* (London: Routledge, 1990); B. Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin de siècle Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); R. Dyer, 'Children of the Night: Vampirism as Homosexuality, Homosexuality as Vampirism', in S. Radstone (ed.), *Sweet Dreams: Sexuality, Gender and Popular Fiction* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988); K. Gelder, *Reading the Vampire* (London: Routledge, 1994); D. Glover, *Vampires, Mummies and Liberals: Bram Stoker and the Politics of Popular Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); J. Halberstam, 'Technologies of Monstrosities: Bram Stoker's *Dracula*', in Ledger and McCracken (eds.), *The Cultural Politics at the Fin De Siecle*, pp. 248-266; R. Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981); F. Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms* (London, Verso, 1983); D. Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848-c.1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); D. Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day* (London and New York: Longman, 1980); E. Kosofsky-Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (New York and London: Methuen, 1986); E. Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Penguin, 1990).

[viii] F. Botting, *The Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 131.

[ix] M. Ellmann, *The Hunger Artists. Starving, Writing & Imprisonment* (London: Virago, 1993), p. 26.

[x] Ellmann, *The Hunger Artists*, pp 25-26.

[xi] The relationship between appetite as an expression for consumer desire is further discussed in the various chapters of K. Lysack, *Come Buy, Come Buy: Shopping and the Culture of Consumption in Victorian Women's Writing* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2008)

[xii] S. A. Russell, *Hunger. An Unnatural History* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), p. 23.

[xiii] K. Hamsun, *Hunger* (Edinburgh, Canongate, 1996), p. 27.

[xiv] K. Hamsun, *Hunger*, p. 110.

[xv] N. Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 216.

[xvi] L. Heldke, 'Foodmaking as a Thoughtful Practice' in D.W. Curtin and L. M. Heldke (eds.), *Cooking, Eating, Thinking* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), pp. 203-29, on p. 203.

[xvii] Skubal, *Word of Mouth*, p. 46.

[xviii] J.Halberstam, 'Technologies of Monstrosities: Bram Stoker's Dracula', in Ledger and McCracken (eds.), *The Cultural Politics at the Fin De Siecle* pp. 248-266, on p.249.

[xix] K. Gelder, *Reading the Vampire* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.43.

[xx] B. Stoker, *Dracula* (1897) (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1993), p. 307.

[xxi] Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, p. 394-95.

[xxii] A discussion of the sexual politics underlying *Dracula* is discussed in texts such as R. Barreca, (ed.), *Sex and Death in Victorian* Literature (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990); E. Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester; Manchester University Press, 1992); C. Craft, '"Kiss me with Those red Lips": Gender and Invasion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*', in Elaine Showalter (ed.), *Speaking of Gender* (London: Routledge, 1990); B. Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin de siècle Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); E. Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de siècle* (New York: Penguin, 1990); J. Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995); D. Heiland, *Gothic and Gender: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); K. Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism and Degeneration at the Fin de Siecle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[xxiii] B. Stoker, *Dracula*, p. 271.

[xxiv] B. Stoker, *Dracula*, p. 363.

[xxv] S. Freud, 'Three Essays on Sexuality' in *On Sexuality: The Penguin Freud Library Vol. 7*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), [page range?], on p. 98.

[xxvi] S. Freud, 'Three Essays on Sexuality', pp. 144-45.

[xxvii] M. Ellmann, *The Hunger Artists*, p. 35.

[xxviii] M. Ellmann, *The Hunger Artists,* p. 39.

[xxix] E. Probyn, *Carnal Appetites.FoodSexIdentities* (London &New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 11.

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[xxxii] S. Le Fanu, 'Carmilla', in *In A Glass Darkly* (1872) (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1990), pp. 244-314, p. 244.

[xxxiii] S. Le Fanu, 'Prologue: Martin Hesselius, the German Physician', in *In a Glass Darkly*, pp. 3-4, p. 3.

[xxxiv] S. le Fanu, 'Carmilla', p. 279.

[xxxv] J. Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings*. *Spectrality, Gothic, The Uncanny and Literature* (London: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 2-3.

[xxxvi] The ongoing fascination with and proliferations of vampire stories in the 20th and 21st centuries show very clearly that their ghost cannot laid to rest.

[xxxvii] N. Royle, *The Uncanny*, p. 24.

[xxxviii] S. Le Fanu, 'Carmilla', p. 244.

[xxxix] S. Le Fanu p. 275.

[xl] S. Le Fanu, p. 285.

[xli] S. Le Fanu, 'Carmilla', in *In A Glass Darkly* (1872) (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1990), pp. 244-314, p. 244.

[xlii] S. Le Fanu, 'Carmilla', in *In A Glass Darkly* (1872) (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1990), pp. 244-314, p. 287.

[xliii] E. Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body. Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p. 30.

[xliv] E. Bronfen, p. 30.

[xlv] E. Bronfen, p. 31

[xlvi] J. Copjec, 'Vampires, Breast-Feeding and Anxiety (extract)', in K. Gelder (ed), *The Horror Reader* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 52-63, on p.55.

[xlvii] J. Copjec, 'Vampires, Breast-Feeding and Anxiety (extract)', p. 59.

[xlviii] J. Copjec, 'Vampires, Breast-Feeding and Anxiety (extract)', p. 60.

[xlix] J. Copjec, 'Vampires, Breast-Feeding and Anxiety (extract)', p. 60.

[l] J. Copjec, 'Vampires, Breast-Feeding and Anxiety (extract)', p. 59.

[li] J.-A. Miller, 'Extimité', *Prose Studies* 11 (1988), pp. 121-30, on p. 123.

[lii] For further reading on the relationship between the Gothic and representation of eating disorders see, A. Michelis, ''Am I a Vampire then, who Must have a Spike Driven into my Heart?' Monstrosity and the Gothic in Illness Narratives and Medical Advice Literature on Eating Disorders', *Gothic Studies*, 17:1 (2015), pp. 78-91.